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A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF THE SCHOOL COUNCIL SECTION IN THE 1988 SCHOOL ACT

Final Report

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Policy and Evaluation Branch
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AE
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Executive Summary

Changes were made to the School Act in 1988 to involve parents in important decisions regarding their children's education. Section 17 of the School Act gave parents the right to establish school councils while allowing for flexibility in its structure. This study was carried out to investigate the impact of school councils on the operation of schools and the education provided to students. The sample was designed to give a representative cross-section of the various types of parent groups reported by regional office staff. Thirty-one jurisdictions were selected with each jurisdiction offering potentially eight interviews from a superintendent, a school board chair, three principals, and three parent chairs of each school's parent group. All interviews were conducted in June 1990 by telephone and 87.1% of the school board chairs, 100% of the principals, and 76.3% of the parent chairs were successfully interviewed. Additionally, 30 school council policies from jurisdictions were reviewed (including two draft policies). One jurisdiction had yet to develop a school council policy. The research was designed to address five questions. The study results, organized by research question, follow.

Research Question 1: To what extent have groups of parents in Alberta exercised their prerogative to form school councils under the School Act?

a) About 80 percent of the parent groups contacted in this study either formed as a result of the School Council section of the 1988 School Act, reformed so they would fall within the Act, or decided they fit the Act as they were constituted. Only three percent of the schools contacted had no parent group at all. Although the sample was not random, it was selected to give a cross-section of parent group activity as affected by the Act across the province.

b) Parent group names were selected with care to reflect local perception of the role the School Council was to play. Of the 69 self-identified School Councils, only 27.5 percent chose to go by that name. Twenty-three percent called themselves Parent Advisory Councils and 11.6 percent called themselves Parent Councils.

c) Of the Home and School Associations, five out of seven were among the category of parent group that reviewed their mission and chose to stay the way they were although they did not meet every guideline in the School Act. The remaining two groups felt they met the guidelines.

Research Question 2: What functions do school councils and other parent groups commonly serve?

a) Functions most commonly served include: communication between staff and parents, help with or running school events, input into school, fundraising, classroom assistance, and being involved with student oriented programs. Fundraising was least characteristic of "Newly Formed" groups.

b) Anticipated changes for the next couple of years in terms of parent group functions were in the areas of increased help in the school and increased input into the school.

Research Question 3: Were there problems encountered by parent groups in forming or maintaining school councils under the School Act and how were they resolved?

a) Developing ways to communicate with various groups (parents, staff, school board, outside agencies) was the most prevalent problem and the most frequently unresolved. Under half the groups reporting the problem had solved it.

b) Bringing about program change was the most frequently reported problem that had been resolved.

c) Bringing about facility change was a less frequent problem and it had been resolved by half of the groups facing it.

d) Challenges that were resolved were often those that were attacked repeatedly or those where group members took the initiative in bringing about the desired result rather than waiting for another agency to act. Also important was the strategy of getting input from the groups who would be affected by the decision under question.

e) Parent apathy was the most common problem anticipated in the next couple of years particularly among groups who decided to "Stay the Same."

Research Question 4: What rules have boards established for setting up school councils?

a) School council membership was defined to varying degrees by almost all policies. However there was some ambiguity perceived about the number of people needed to form a school council. Differences arose in whether all parents or adults in the community were members or whether specific numbers from each group would be represented, and whether staff, administration or students would be represented. About a quarter of the school council policies reviewed called for an executive to be elected from school council members. This was a point of confusion for some in interpreting the Act: whether they were expected to have an executive or whether they were to limit school council membership to a manageable size.

b) All policies addressed formation of school councils. The majority required the principal to take the initiative; however about one-third required parents to take the initiative.

c) Rules for dissolution of councils were included in all but one of the policies reviewed.

d) A minority of policies defined the minimum member of meetings to be held a year, who was to chair the group and who was to develop agendas. About a quarter also ruled out discussion of individual staff or student meetings.

Research Question 5: What is the relationship between school boards and school councils?

a) School boards and school councils were most likely to report a good relationship where the parent group was either "Newly Formed" or "Reformed."

b) About half the school board chairs interviewed saw the relationship between their board and the parent group as supportive to education. Suggested changes focused on improved communication, role clarification and more time being spent attending parent council meetings.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Board Action

Conclusion 1: It is not clear in many school council policies the minimum number of members required to form a school council.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that school council policies state the minimum number of members required to form a school council and that the minimum be set reasonably low.

Conclusion 2: School council policies that require parents to take the initiative in forming a school council could deter the formation of councils if parents are not aware of their right to form a council and of the necessary process to follow.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that boards require schools to inform their parents of the steps to take should they wish to form a school council where some form of school council is not currently in place.

Conclusion 3: Although some school council policies included requirements for chairing of meetings, development of agendas or requirements for a quorum, school councils have the power to determine their own conduct for running meetings.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that boards recognize that school councils have the power to determine their own manner of conducting meetings; school council policies should reflect this.

Conclusion 4: By ruling out discussion of individual students or staff at meetings, some policies did not reflect the advisory nature of school councils. They were not intended to be limited in scope in any way by the School Act.

Recommendation 4A: It is recommended that boards review their school council policies to ensure that school councils are encouraged to give advice on any topics within the legislated mandate of a school council. School councils themselves have the discretion to determine any limitations they wish to place on topics for giving advice.

Recommendation 4B: It is recommended that boards advise parent groups of constraints in legislation regarding personnel matters and where to seek advice before dealing with such matters.

Conclusion 5: In cases where principals chair school council meetings, the principal could be in conflict of interest when "the chair" advises "the principal" on matters recommended by the school council.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that a parent serve as chair for school council meetings and that the principal sit as a member of school council in keeping with the advisory nature of the council (to give advice to school administration and the school board).

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I: INTRODUCTION

Background

The Publication introducing the School Act, *Framework for our Children's Future: The School Act. 1988* sets the stage for school councils.

> The new School Act was designed to reflect the important fact that parents must be involved in a meaningful way in important decisions about their children's education. No changes have been made which would in any way compromise the parent's role in the education of their children. But many people, including parents, told us that as long as there was a provision for the establishment of school councils, there was no need to specify how they should be established, what their membership should be, and what role they should play. These decisions can and should be made locally and can vary across the province depending on the wishes of parents and school boards. Consequently, changes have been made in the School Act which retain the right of parents to establish school councils but allow for flexibility. Decisions about the formation and operation of school councils are left to parents and their elected school boards.
>
> (p. 4)

The Legislation for School Councils found in the School Act reads as follows:

> 17 (1) Parents of students attending a school may establish a school council for that school.
>
> (2) The majority of the members of the school council of a school must be parents of students attending that school.
>
> (3) A school council may
>
> (a) advise the principal of the school and the board respecting any matter relating to the school, and
>
> (b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation.
>
> (4) The parents of students attending a school may dissolve the school council of that school in accordance with rules made under this section respecting the dissolution of the school council.
>
> (5) The board shall make rules respecting the establishment of a school council, the election of members and the dissolution of the school council.
>
> (6) A school council may, subject to any rules made under this section, make by-laws governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.

Purpose

This study was carried out to investigate the impact of school councils on the operation of schools and the education provided to students. Five research questions guided the investigation. First, to what extent have groups of parents in Alberta exercised their prerogative to form school councils under the School Act? Second, what functions do school councils and other parent groups commonly serve? Third, were there any problems encountered by parent groups in forming or maintaining school councils under the School Act? What solutions did parents find to the problems? Fourth, what rules have boards established for setting up school councils? Finally, what was the relationship between school boards and school councils?

Methods

Thirty-one jurisdictions from across the province were selected for the sample to give a representative cross-section of the various types of parent groups reported by regional office staff. Background interviews were conducted with 19 superintendents who were also asked to nominate three schools for the survey. The remaining superintendents submitted nominations by mail.

The three nominated schools from each jurisdiction provided a maximum of eight interviews for each jurisdiction (1 superintendent, 1 school board chair, 3 principals, and 3 parent chairs of each school's parent group). Fewer than eight interviews from a jurisdiction were obtained whenever the principal also acted as chair of the parent group.

All interviews were conducted in June 1990 by telephone and response rates are reported in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Interview Sample

	Total	Number of Respondents	%
School Board Chairs	31	27	87.1
Principals	93	93	100.0
Parents	93	71	76.3

A total of 30 school council policies from jurisdictions were reviewed (including two draft policies). One jurisdiction had yet to develop a school council policy.

The percentages in the majority of the tables in the report give the ratio of the number of people who mentioned the category over the total number of people who gave any answer to the question. The number of total respondents (n's) in each table varies accordingly.

Parent groups were categorized according to the impact the School Act had on them. The groups are labeled as follows:

Newly Formed: These are groups created as a result of the changes in the 1988 School Act.

Reformed: These are groups existing prior to the School Act changes, but which chose to alter their structure to meet the guidelines outlined in the School Act.

Fit the Act: As suggested by the title, these are groups existing prior to the School Act changes that did not change their structure since they felt they already met the guidelines.

Stayed the Same: Unlike the Fit the Act groups, these groups reviewed their mission and chose to stay the way they were even though they did not meet every guideline outlined in the School Act.

Most school boards had more than one category of parent group within the jurisdiction. Interviews with principals and chairs of parent groups were separated for analysis according to the category that fit the parent group at their school. Most parents were not clear on the effect the School Act had had on the formation of their group. (Where this was the case, the information was obtained from the principal's interview for that school.) The proportion of parent chairs to principals for each category of School Act impact is relatively close (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Impact of the School Act on Groups Represented by Principal and Parent Group Chair Interviews

Impact of the School Act on Parent Groups	Principals n = 93	%	Parent Chairs n = 71	%
Newly Formed	25	26.9	18	25.4
Reformed	12	12.9	11	15.5
Fit the Act	32	34.4	24	33.8
Stayed the Same	16	17.2	11	15.5
Unknown	5	5.4	4	5.6
No parent group	3	3.2	3	4.2

II: SCHOOL COUNCIL FORMATION

Extent of Formation of School Councils

One of the key goals of the study was to determine the impact of the new School Act on the operation of parent groups. One measure of this impact is the extent to which parents have exercised their prerogative to form school councils, as outlined in the 1988 School Act. Table 2.1 lists the frequencies of the various types of parent groups according to the impact the School Act had on them. The 'Other' type includes names that were more or less unique. They include names like 'Local Advisory Board', 'Community and School Association', Parent Support Group', 'Parent Liaison Committee', 'Parents for Education' and so on. Because of the variety of names in use, all groups will be referred to as "parent groups" unless a specific subset is being referred to.

As indicated in Table 2.1, the Act has had an effect. Out of the 85 schools with parent groups, 37 (43.5%) either did not exist prior to the Act (newly formed) or had changed their structure to match the one outlined in the Act (reformed). Thirty-two groups considered they fit the Act already.

Table 2.1: Comparison of Parent Group Type by Impact of the School Act.*

Group Type	Newly Formed	Reformed	Fit the Act	Stayed the Same	Totals
School Council	7	7	5	1	20
Parent Council	4	2	2	0	8
Parent Advisory Council	7	2	7	4	20
Home and School Assc.	0	0	2	5	7
Other	7	1	16	6	30
Total	25	12	32	16	85

* Principals' responses only. Although parents were also asked, their responses were unreliable because most were not on the council if and when changes resulting from the School Act were made.

Reasons School Councils Were Not Formed

Despite the number of groups which were affected by changes in the School Act, the survey found 16 of the groups (18.8%) chose to stay the same even though they were not a school council as outlined in the School Act. The reasons why are clearly important in understanding how the School Act changes were interpreted. Listed in Table 2.2 are the three most frequently cited reasons. First, half of the principals and just over a quarter of the parents felt their parent group was successful in its present form. A few respondents presented this view in the form of "why fix something that does not need fixing?" A second reason pertains specifically to the nature of school councils themselves: they are considered too formal. Such comments generally referred to interpretations of school councils as requiring some form of open election. Many of these groups would prefer to operate in an informal fashion with any interested party being free to participate without elections. Finally, although not cited by many respondents, the third reason, "concerns

over the School Act," is significant to this study. One parent felt that the Act was too broad, thereby allowing the school board to interpret the legislation as it saw fit; another did not want any non-parent members on the council; and both principals were afraid the new structure would encourage people with hidden agendas to form a school council, thereby forcing the current group out of existence.

"Other" reasons cited varied considerably. Some parents are waiting for the school board to finalize their school council policy; some felt it was too much trouble to switch over to a school council; a couple of principals indicated they would change over to a school council if parents requested it; one parent mentioned that they had become a society to fundraise and felt becoming a school council would force them to lose this legal status; and one parent group chose to wait and see what other groups in their area were going to do.

Table 2.2: Reasons Why Parent Groups Did Not Reform to Become School Councils

Reason	Principal n=16	Parent n=11
Parent group was successful as is	50.0%	27.3%
School councils are too formal	37.5	18.2
Concerns over School Act	12.5	18.2
Other	37.5	27.3

Changes the Act Brought About

This section shifts the focus from changes in the schools to changes within the jurisdictions. School board chairs were asked what effect the School Act has had thus far in their jurisdiction. They were also asked what effects they expected the Act to have in the near future.

A slight majority of school board chairs emphasized a lack of change, both current and expected, resulting from the School Act (see Table 2.3). Thus far, any effect the Act has had has been largely positive within the jurisdictions. In the future, the chairs expect the change to be either positive or neutral in nature. Less than a quarter anticipated any negative concerns or consequences resulting from the 1988 School Act in the near future.

Table 2.3: Changes School Board Chairs Expected as a Result of the School Act

Type of Change	Current Effects n=25	Expected Effects n=22
Positive change	40.0%	18.2%
Negative change	0.0	22.7
No change	52.0	40.9
Neither positive nor negative change	0.0	27.3
Other	16.0	0.0

Agents Most Responsible for Change

All school council policies addressed a mechanism for forming a school council. Two-thirds of the policies required the principal to take the first step by calling a meeting or advising parents of their option to form a school council. One-third required parents (usually a specific minimum number) to make a written request to the principal to take action. Without the formal request the principal was not required to take action towards formation of a school council. Principals and parents were asked for their perceptions of who was responsible for bringing about any change in the parent advisory group or in forming a group for the first time. Principals' perceptions are reported in Table 2.4. Few parents knew who was most responsible.

According to principals, they and other school staff (e.g.vice-principals and department heads) were frequently the initiators of change. This is especially true of groups that existed prior to the changes in the School Act. For these groups 90.9% of the principals were the key change agents, whereas only 57.1% of the newly created groups were initiated by principals. Almost a quarter of the groups in this latter category found the parents playing an important role in their formation. Often the parents used the help of a school official to overcome any problems. In one case parents needed the support of a trustee, in another parents needed the help of a principal to overcome staff reluctance. Finally, the role of jurisdictional officials was often in passing a school council policy. A number of principals mentioned they acted only as a result of the new policy.

Table 2.4: Agents most Responsible for Changing the Parent Group According to Principals

Agents	Creating n=21	Reforming n=12
Principal	57.1%	90.9%
Parents	23.8	0.0
School board/superintendent	19.1	9.1

III: SCHOOL ACT INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of the School Council Section of the School Act was examined from an analysis of School Council Policies, comments regarding the Act, and the arrangements by which parent groups were chaired.

Analysis of Policies

Name of Parent Advisory Groups

The name of the parent advisory group was important in that it reflected the particular focus and formation of the group desired by the school board. The name provided for School Councils according to the policies was:

School Council	18
School Advisory Committee, Home and School Association, Parent Liaison Committee, or other parent advisory group	6
School Advisory Council	4
Community Advisory Council	1
Form and name may vary from school to school	1

A total of 20 policies indicated the school council was advisory to the principal and to the board; four indicated the school council was advisory to the principal and two indicated the school council was advisory to the school. Four made no reference to the advisory nature of the school council.

Establishment of a School Council

All policies addressed a mechanism for forming a school council. Two-thirds of the policies required the principal to take the first step by calling a meeting or advising parents of their option to form a school council. One-third required parents (usually a specific minimum number) to make a written request to the principal to take action.

Structure of School Councils

School Council membership was referred to by all but two policies. Reference to parent membership was included in 26 policies, to community members in 13 policies, to school administrators in 11 policies, to students in 11 policies and to teaching staff in 13

policies. References sometimes included whether the members were to be elected and almost always included the number of members from the category in question.

Eight policies referred to an executive to be elected from school council members. Rocky Mountain School Division allowed the option of a large group of school council members that would elect an executive or a small group of elected members with no executive.

The County of Strathcona has a policy for a Committee of School Advisory Councils composed of School Advisory Council Chairs to provide advice to the Board on philosophy, policies and procedures. A trustee acts as chair and the Committee meets at least once annually with the Board of Education.

Dissolution of School Councils

Dissolution of school councils was referred to by all but one policy. Requirements specified whether the majority of parents with students in the school or a specific minimum number of parents were required to request a meeting to dissolve the council or to vote in favour of dissolution.

By-laws Governing Meetings and Business and Conduct of Affairs

The number of policies that made reference to meetings and conduct of affairs were as follows:

number of meetings (minimum of 2 to 6 per year)		7
chairing of meetings		10
principal or designate required as chair	6	
encouragement to have principal as chair	3	
chair to be elected from membership	1	
development of agendas (by principal and school council or by co-chairs)		4
requirement to form a quorum		3
Robert's Rules of Order		2
as a guide	1	
required	1	
community may have joint school council meetings (i.e. school councils from 2 or more schools could hold meetings together)		1

ruling out discussion at meetings of individual students or staff	7
keeping of books	1
annual report to the Board	3

Comments Regarding the School Act

School Board Chairs

School board chairs were asked if they had any comments on the School Council section of the School Act. The comments are summarized in Table 3.1 and presented in detail in the following paragraphs. About half saw it as a positive step. On the other hand, 44.0% of the respondents gave apprehensive comments, and 12.0% expressed concerns about the Act's ambiguity. The total number of respondents giving apprehensive comments and/or concerns over ambiguity was 52.0% (some gave both categories of response). It should be noted that concerns about ambiguity in the Act were raised only by two of the ten school board chairs with no school councils in their jurisdictions. Secondly, the five school board chairs from jurisdictions with school councils as the only form of parent advisory group did not raise any negative comments or concerns about the Act's ambiguity.

Positive - - The positive aspects of the school council section of the 1988 School Act were its ability to give parents another avenue of access to education officials, its flexibility, the likelihood of increased parental involvement, the formal recognition it gives to the role parents must play, and the Act's clear mandate. Also, a couple of Chairs mentioned that school councils were not as threatening as others have made them out to be. In view of the next category, not all Chairs agreed with this statement.

Apprehension - - Chairs specified the following concerns about the School Act: (1) School councils could become a problem if strong-minded people with personal agendas became the chair of the group. In such situations the school council might undermine existing parent groups which are not school councils (e.g. Home and School was one group specifically mentioned) by demanding school council election. (2) Concerns that the School Act could be interpreted wildly by the group were also raised. If this happened, then the school council could threaten the school board on the basis of it too being an elected body. (3) There was a concern that school boards might delegate too much power to the school councils. (4) The school board has the whole division to look at, not just the interests of one school. Hence, there is a concern that school councils, which are focused on the needs of particular schools, may become disillusioned should the school board decide against them in favour of the whole. Two chairs suggested that since school boards are ultimately responsible for any activity taking place within their schools, then they should have the authority to approve school council's goals and objectives.

Ambiguity - - There were three aspects of school councils that were ambiguous. First was the number of people needed to form the school council when an election was called. Did one need a certain percentage of the school's parent population, or would ten parents be enough? Second, how should the process of establishing a school council work. While related to the previous concern, it also includes the whole concept of what a council was. Was the elected executive the council or could unelected parents attending the meetings be considered part of the council? Finally, how was the authority of the school board and of the school council divided. Could the school board regulate the council's goals? Could it audit and hold the school council accountable for raised funds?

Other - - One Chair wanted to have one school council in towns where there were two schools since it was often the same people attending both. However, their interpretation of the Act has prevented them from consolidating the two. Another felt it unfortunate that parents were too apathetic to even take advantage of the school council legislation. Another said they would wait and see before passing a judgement. Finally one chair was concerned the Home and School Associations were being negatively affected.

Table 3.1: Reactions of the School Board Chairs to the School Council Section of the School Act[1]

Comments	n=22
A positive step	59.1%
Apprehension	50.0
Ambiguity in the Act	13.6
No comments to add	18.2
Other	18.2

[1]Some respondents gave more than one category of response.

Principals and Parents

Principals and parent chairs were asked in the last question of the interview if they had any "brickbats or bouquets for School Councils as outlined in the new School Act." Responses related to the Act are reported here. Three main findings regarding the opinions of principals and parents on the School Act may be derived from Table 3.2. First, no parent chair of the 'Stayed the Same' group made any positive comment about the School Act. The significance of this lack of enthusiasm by these parents is difficult to judge given the small number of respondents. Nonetheless, it may be more than just coincidence that parents of groups that did not change to become school councils did not make any positive statement about the School Act. Furthermore, principals of the 'Stayed the Same' parent groups were the most critical of the School Act, with 29.4% expressing negative comments.

Perhaps more surprising is the fact the principals of newly formed groups were also not especially enthusiastic about the new School Act. Whether this reflects concerns over having a group involved in the school that had not been involved previously is difficult to determine. However, it should be noted the parent chairs of the 'Newly Formed' groups were much more enthusiastic about the School Act. They made more favourable comments

and fewer negative ones. This may reflect the fact they now have a role that they did not have prior to the changes in the School Act. Principals of groups that 'Fit the Act' already were the most positive of all. They were also the least likely to mention negative comments. Having worked to establish a parent group based on a particular organizational model, it is not surprising they should see changes to the School Act recommending a similar parent group structure favourably. If anything, the 1988 School Act legitimizes their efforts.

Workable Act - -Comments included in this category held that the Act was vague but flexible, provided clear guidelines, provided structure and direction to the group, and its provision to dissolve the group was important.

Act Gave School Council Tools - - These comments referred to the legislation's ability to improve parental involvement. Formal recognition of the role the parents play in the schools (legitimization) gave parents the impetus to start a group where none existed, and made it less intimidating to approach principals, staff, other parents, and community groups.

Negative Comments - - Many of these comments parallel the ones made by school board chairs. The comments generally maintain the Act is too broad or vague. For example, the school council's role is unclear, who is a member?, how do parents get involved if the council gets dissolved or no one is interested in forming an executive?, and what to do about personnel issues? Other comments include concerns about the school board interfering with the school council, and concerns about the word "advisory" not being in the School Council title of the Act. This latter concern was raised by a principal who felt the word's absence might give parents the idea that the principal is responsible to them and must therefore follow their wishes.

Table 3.2: Comments made by Principals and Parents Regarding the School Act.*

Comments	Newly Formed		Reformed		Fit the Act		Stayed the Same	
	Principal n=26	Parent n=17	Principal n=12	Parent n=11	Principal n=33	Parent n=22	Principal n=17	Parent n=11
Positive Comments								
Workable Act	11.5%	11.8%	16.7%	9.1%	15.2%	4.5%	5.9%	0.0%
Act gave school council tools	11.5	23.5	8.3	9.1	27.3	22.7	17.6	0.0
Negative								
School Act	23.1	5.9	16.7	18.2	12.1	9.1	29.4	9.1

* Although respondents were asked to comment about the school council section of the School Act, many respondents preferred to comment on the positive or negative role of their parent group in their school.

Chairing of Parent Groups

The chairing arrangement reported by principals according to the parent group category is presented in Table 3.3. The four types of arrangements the survey found are: parent as chair, principal as chair, both principal and parent chairing, and rotation of the chair among parents. It appears that a majority of parent groups in each of the categories are chaired by parents. Co-chairmanships between principals and parents is the second most frequent chairing arrangement. This suggests parents have significant input in setting the agenda of their parent meetings.

The chairing arrangement gives a measure of control of meetings to the person in the chair. Groups which 'Fit the Act' are most likely to have the principal as chair (24.2%). The co-chairing arrangement allows the principal to have partial control over what the parent group undertakes and was most commonly found in 'Newly Formed' and 'Reformed' groups. Summing the percentages of both principals as chair and principal as co-chair arrangements shows that half of the 'Newly Formed' groups and the Reformed groups allow the principal to influence parent initiatives through the chair. Only one-third to one-fifth of the two groups that did not change after the Act (either because they 'Fit the Act' already, or because they chose to 'Stay the Same') were subject to any direct form of influence by the principal from the chair.

Table 3.3: Chairs of Parent Groups as Reported by Principals

Chair	Newly Formed n=26	Reformed n=12	Fit the Act n=33	Stayed the Same n=16
Parent	46.2%	50.0%	66.7%	75.0%
Principal	19.2	8.3	24.2	18.8
Co-Chair	30.8	41.7	9.1	0.0
Rotation	3.8	0.0	0.0	6.3

Principals were asked if the chairing arrangements worked well or if they could suggest something that might work better. Of the principals who chaired the group and chose to comment, about half thought a parent should be the chair and about half said parents did not want to take the chair (in other words, all supported a parent as chair). A few principals held a veto right where a parent chaired the group. It should be noted that only councils have the right to give the principal 'veto power.'

IV: FUNCTIONS PARENT GROUPS COMMONLY PERFORM

One of the main purposes of the survey was to find out what functions parent groups undertake to support their school. Our objective was to take this information and help disseminate it to groups who are looking for ideas on the possible scope of what a school council can accomplish.

Current Functions

Parents and principals were asked what functions or roles their parent group has undertaken over the past year. Since there was little variance in response between principals and parents, only the parent response is reported. Table 4.1 provides a general overview of the functions.

The most frequently reported function by all categories of parent groups was 'communication between staff and parents.' Tied with that was 'fundraising' for groups that 'Stayed the Same' and 'helping with or running school events' for groups that 'Reformed.' 'Input into school' ranked second for 'Newly Formed,' 'Reformed,' and 'Stayed the Same' categories and third for groups that 'Fit the Act.' Fundraising was reported by only a quarter of 'Newly Formed' groups as compared to about half of the other categories. (Examples of each function are included in the Appendix.)

Table 4.1: Functions Currently Served by the Parent Groups

Functions	Newly Formed n=18	Reformed n=11	Fit the Act n=24	Stayed the Same n=11
Help with/run school events	38.9%	63.6%	37.5%	45.5%
Help with renovations	5.6	9.1	4.2	9.1
Classroom assistance	22.2	27.3	50.0	27.3
Input in school	55.6	54.5	41.7	45.5
Student oriented programs	22.2	27.3	33.3	45.5
Fundraising	27.8	45.5	50.0	54.5
Did not raise funds	11.1	9.1	0.0	18.2
Community related	22.2	27.3	16.7	18.2
Parent education workshops	11.1	0.0	33.3	9.1
Communication between staff and parents	61.1	63.6	62.5	54.5
Communication with non-school agencies	33.3	45.5	33.3	36.4

Future Roles

Parents and principals were also asked what roles they saw for the parent group in the next couple of years. Parents of groups who 'Stayed the Same' all wanted to do more than they were currently doing (see Table 4.2). Not one mentioned "no change" for the future. On the other hand, one-quarter to over half of the parents of the other group categories saw no change in role for their group in the future.

The role for the future mentioned most frequently was 'increased help in the school'. Fifty percent of principals of Reformed groups, and 46.2 percent of principals of groups that 'Stayed the Same' suggested this role. This was the second most frequently mentioned category by principals of groups that 'Fit the Act' (28.1%) and principals of 'Newly Formed' groups mentioned it as frequently as their desire for increased input (37.5%). In addition, a high proportion of parents of groups choosing to 'Stay the Same' saw this role for the future. (See the Appendix for examples)

Table 4.2: Roles Principals and Parents See For Parent Groups in the Future

Roles	Newly Formed		Reformed		Fit the Act		Stay the Same	
	Principal n=24	Parent n=15	Principal n=12	Parent n=10	Principal n=32	Parent n=19	Principal n=15	Parent n=10
Increased help in the school	37.5%	26.7%	50.0%	0.0%	28.1%	31.6%	46.7%	70.0%
Increased input	37.5	60.0	16.7	10.0	25.0	15.8	33.3	10.0
No change	20.8	26.7	16.7	60.0	31.3	31.6	13.3	0.0
School council changes	16.7	20.0	16.7	20.0	6.3	5.3	13.3	10.0
Increased communication	16.7	0.0	16.7	0.0	3.1	5.3	13.3	0.0
Increased fundraising	8.3	0.0	25.0	10.0	6.3	15.8	0.0	10.0
Decreased fundraising	4.2	0.0	8.3	0.0	3.1	5.3	0.0	20.0
Lobbying	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0	6.3	5.3	0.0	10.0
Other	4.2	0.0	16.7	10.0	6.3	5.3	13.3	20.0

V: CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENT GROUPS

Resolved and Unresolved Challenges

Challenges faced by the parent advisory groups that were worked out successfully were generally similar whether the group was 'Newly Formed', had 'Reformed' as a school council, whether the existing group 'Fit the Act' or whether the group decided to 'Stay the Same.'

Challenges faced and worked out or still unresolved are reported in Table 5.1. Although the ways challenges were solved varied in their specific details, there were some general approaches that were used in the majority of cases either singly or in combination. These approaches included:

1) attacking the challenge repeatedly; the second or third attempts might be variations on the first (e.g. revising a report and resubmitting it to the school boards) or a different strategy was tried;

2) getting input from people who would be affected by a decision (such as parents, students, staff) through surveys, meetings, school events; and

3) taking the initiative among group members to work out problems themselves e.g. getting volunteers to help with landscaping, writing proposals, organizing school tours.

Problems that were unresolved at the time of the interview fell into many of the same categories as challenges that had been resolved. Communication difficulties were the most frequently unresolved problem. Six groups were having difficulty getting parents to attend meetings. Three groups had unresolved situations with staff such as wanting more input into the school than they currently had. Two complained that the school board consulted with them but then did not act on their advice. Three referred to difficulties in influencing outside agencies regarding concerns such as equity funding and school population decline. The two categories of groups reporting almost all the unresolved communication problems were those who had newly formed and those who had reformed as a School Council.

The second most frequent type of unresolved challenge was in bringing about desired renovations to school buildings or building of a new facility. Unresolved school program issues centered around Distance Education, French Immersion and grouping of junior high grades in schools with other grades.

Table 5.1: Challenges Faced by Parent Groups

Type of Challenge	No. Reporting Challenge Resolved	No. Reporting Challenge Unresolved
Developing ways to communicate with parents, school staff, school board, or outside agencies	11	14
Bringing about program change	12	5
Bringing about facility change	7	6
Organizing school events	7	4
Developing policies for student conduct	5	1
Fundraising	3	2
Revising busing policy	3	1
Mobilizing the group	4	0
Implementing school safety changes	2	1

Problems Expected

Turning now to problems respondents expected might arise in the next couple of years, we find little evidence suggesting the School Act changes are a systematic source of problems. Table 5.2 indicates that most parent groups expected no problems. The only exception were parents of groups that 'Stayed the Same.' They clearly were concerned about parent apathy. All parents, in fact, were more concerned about parent apathy than were the principals. However, parents of groups that 'Stayed the Same' were disproportionately concerned. What is odd is that principals of the groups choosing to 'Stay the Same' were the least concerned about parent apathy. Had they been the group of principals most concerned about apathy then it might have been possible to argue that the school council organizational structure helps attenuate parent apathy. But the ambiguous results prevent one from concluding this.

Finally, it can be concluded from Table 5.2 that potential conflicts and tensions are largely a principals' issue. Only 3.2% of the entire parent sample mentioned they expected some political problems to develop in the future. On the other hand, 14.5% of all the principals mentioned it. What is interesting is that principals of groups that did not change as a result of the changes in the School Act were twice as likely to mention potential conflict as principals of groups that did change. Potential conflict issues included factionalism with parents separating into groups along interest lines, complaint sessions about staff, confidentiality problems, and having two parent groups in the school.

Table 5.2: Future Problems Expected

Problems	Newly Formed		Reformed		Fit the Act		Stayed the Same	
	Principal n=26	Parent n=18	Principal n=12	Parent n=11	Principal n=32	Parent n=22	Principal n=16	Parent n=11
None expected	61.5%	50.0%	75.0%	54.5%	62.5%	59.1%	62.5%	18.2%
Parent apathy	26.9	33.3	16.7	45.5	18.8	36.4	6.3	72.7
Potential conflict/tensions	7.7	11.1	8.3	0.0	15.6	0.0	18.8	0.0

VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT GROUPS AND SCHOOL BOARD

Parent Group Perspective

Parent group chairs were asked what the relationship was between their group and the school board. Where the group was 'Newly Formed' or Reformed' a majority volunteered that the relationship was good (see Table 6.1). Slightly less than half of the chairs from groups who already 'Fit the Act' commented that the relationship was good and about a quarter of those who decided to 'Stay the Same' reported a good relationship.

More interviewees chose to comment on the frequency of contact between the parent group and the board than on the quality of the relationship. The majority of those in groups that 'Stayed the Same' reported frequent contact. A lower proportion of chairs in the other groups reported frequent contact. No contact was reported by 14 chairs across all groups.

Examples of frequent contact included representatives from the parent group sitting on school board committees or vice versa. Examples of minor contact included occasional attendance of a representative from one group to meetings of the other group, exchange of minutes, and submission of an annual report to the school board by the parent group.

Table 6.1: Relationship Between Parent Group and School Board as Reported by Parent Chairs

Nature of Contact	Newly Formed n=18	Reformed n=11	Fit the Act n=23	Stayed the Same n=11
Good	10	7	10	3
Tension	0	2	1	1
Frequent contact	2	4	10	6
Minor contact	13	3	9	7
No contact	3	3	5	3
Other	1	0	1	1

School Board Chair Perspective

School board chairs were asked if they could give an example of any connection the school board had with parent groups and if they worked together at all. Of the 27 school board chairs, 19 gave an example of direct contact (e.g. trustee attends parent group meetings, parent group chair attends school board meetings, parent group presentations to the school board on an issue, annual meeting with all parent groups and annual public meetings), five gave an example of indirect contact (e.g. exchange of minutes or communication through the principal), and five indicated there was no contact.

A follow-up question asked if the relationship between the board and the parent group was as supportive to education as it could be or if the interviewee saw any changes that would improve it. Many respondents gave more than one answer. Twelve school board chairs saw the relationship as very supportive to education, providing a clear mandate, increasing the amount of parental input or reducing problems in schools; three saw a negative aspect to the relationship including the parent group having narrow or local views or hidden agendas, or goals that had not been submitted for approval to the school board; six had observed no changes to date; eight suggested changes to improve the relationship such as improved communication, educating people about their roles and spending more time attending parent council meetings. One school board chair volunteered the comment that the School Act should give school councils a clearer mandate. Three interviewees thought a change in the relationship was needed but they didn't know what needed changing (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Relationship between School Board and Parent Groups in Terms of its Support to Education According to School Board Chairs

Nature of Relationship	n=27
Positive support	12
Negative	3
No changes observed to date	6
Changes needed	12

In terms of attendance at parent group meetings, seven chairs said either they or another trustee attended all meetings, five said they attended no meetings and the remainder fell somewhere between the two extremes.

VII: CONCLUDING INTERVIEW COMMENTS

Principals and Parent Group Chairs

As mentioned previously, the telephone interview with principals and parent group chairs concluded with the question, "Do you have any brickbats or bouquets for school councils as outlined in the School Act?" An overview of the balance between positive and negative comments is presented in Table 7.1.

Positive comments were the norm with most groups. In addition, parents were, by and large, more positive than the principals.This may be attributable to the fact the parents are expressing attitudes toward their parent group (which they are chairing), while some principals were referring to the School Act and others to their parent group. Principals of 'Newly Formed' groups were the most likely to offer negative or mixed comments.

Table 7.1: Overview of General Comments

Comments	Newly Formed		Reformed		Fit the Act		Stayed the Same	
	Principal n=26	Parent n=17	Principal n=12	Parent n=11	Principal n=33	Parent n=22	Principal n=17	Parent n=11
Positive comments only	34.6%	56.3%	50.0%	63.6%	66.7%	63.6%	43.8%	63.6%
Negative comments only	26.9	6.3	16.6	18.2	12.1	4.5	6.3	9.1
Both positive and negative	30.7	25.0	25.0	9.1	18.2	22.7	31.3	27.3
Neutral only	7.6	12.5	8.3	9.1	3.0	9.1	18.8	0.0

Whereas data in Table 7.1 were collapsed to give an overview, responses are represented in more detail in Table 7.2. Many people gave more than one type of comment. Principals were more likely to emphasize the important role parents have to play in the schools than were parents. However, principals of 'Newly Formed' groups were much less likely to make this comment. Furthermore, if we turn to expressly negative concerns, we not only find that principals are much more concerned about politics resulting from the parent group, but we also find that principals of 'Newly Formed' groups are more concerned than the other principals.

Finally, the data in Table 7.2 suggest that a few parents are somewhat dissatisfied with the amount of input they have. The comments parents made suggest this reflects both an unwillingness of principals to accept any input and the fact the input carries no weight even if the group is asked for some. It is interesting to note that very few principals considered this to be a problem (at least, not one to be recalled spontaneously). Details of the comments are included in the Appendix.

Table 7.2: Breakdown of General Comments

Comments	Newly Formed		Reformed		Fit the Act		Stayed the Same	
	Principal n=26	Parent n=17	Principal n=12	Parent n=11	Principal n=33	Parent n=22	Principal n=17	Parent n=11
Positive:								
General Comments	34.6%	41.2%	50.0%	45.5%	36.4%	63.6%	23.5%	81.8%
Parents needed in schools	7.7	5.9	25.0	0.0	21.2	9.1	29.4	18.2
Communication Role	23.1	11.8	16.7	18.2	18.2	18.2	11.8	18.2
Negative:								
General Comments	11.5	5.9	16.7	0.0	12.1	22.7	5.9	18.2
Input	3.8	11.8	0.0	9.1	0.0	13.6	5.9	18.2
Politics	30.8	5.9	16.7	0.0	12.1	9.1	23.5	0.0
Neutral: General	30.8	35.3	8.3	36.3	9.1	18.2	23.5	18.2

School Board Chairs

The interview with the school board chairs concluded by asking if they had any general comments they wanted to make about school councils or other parent groups. Almost all made positive comments about the parent groups in their jurisdiction (see Table 7.3). This reflects a favourable attitude regarding the involvement of parents in the schools. Many of these positive comments implied parents were needed and their involvement in the school could only help it in educating the children. Consequently, many of the chairs felt school councils helped increase parental involvement.

Nevertheless, Table 7.3 also shows that there were qualifications to this support of school councils. A number expressed negative comments and qualified their support by saying it depended upon one person or another, namely parents, principals, and the School Board. Together 59.1% of the Chairs made one and/or the other qualification. Details of the comments are included in the Appendix.

Table 7.3: School Board Chair Comments About School Councils

Comments	n=22
Positive and neutral	59.3%
Negative and neutral	14.8
Mixed	18.5
Neutral	7.4

VIII. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Re: Research Question 1: To what extent have groups of parents in Alberta exercised their prerogative to form school councils under the School Act?

1) About 80 percent of the parent groups contacted in this study either formed as a result of the School Council section of the 1988 School Act, reformed so they would fall within the Act, or decided they fit the Act as they were constituted. Only three percent of the schools contacted had no parent group at all. Although the sample was not random, it was selected to give a cross-section of parent group activity as affected by the Act across the province.

2) Parent group names were selected with care to reflect local perception of the role the School Council was to play. Of the 69 self-identified School Councils, only 27.5 percent chose to go by that name. Twenty-three percent called themselves Parent Advisory Councils and 11.6 percent called themselves Parent Councils.

3) Of the Home and School Associations, five out of seven were among the category of parent group that reviewed their mission and chose to stay the way they were although they did not meet every guideline in the School Act. The remaining two groups felt they met the guidelines.

Re: Research Question 2: What functions do school councils and other parent groups commonly serve?

4) Functions most commonly served include: communication between staff and parents, help with or running school events, input into school, fundraising, classroom assistance, and being involved with student oriented programs. Fundraising was least characteristic of "Newly Formed" groups.

5) Anticipated changes for the next couple of years in terms of parent group functions were in the areas of increased help in the school and increased input into the school.

Re: Research Question 3: Were there problems encountered by parent groups in forming or maintaining school councils under the School Act and how were they resolved?

6) Developing ways to communicate with various groups (parents, staff, school board, outside agencies) was the most prevalent problem and the most frequently unresolved. Under half the groups reporting the problem had solved it.

7) Bringing about program change was the most frequently reported problem that had been resolved.

8) Bringing about facility change was a less frequent problem and it had been resolved by half of the groups facing it.

9) Challenges that were resolved were often those that were attacked repeatedly or those where group members took the initiative in bringing about the desired result rather than waiting for another agency to act. Also important was the strategy of getting input from the groups who would be affected by the decision under question.

10) Parent apathy was the most common problem anticipated in the next couple of years particularly among groups who decided to "Stay the Same."

Re: Research Question 4: What rules have boards established for setting up school councils?

11) School council membership was defined to varying degrees by almost all policies. However there was some ambiguity perceived about the number of people needed to form a school council. Differences arose in whether all parents or adults in the community were members or whether specific numbers from each group would be represented, and whether staff, administration or students would be represented. About a quarter of the school council policies reviewed called for an executive to be elected from school council members. This was a point of confusion for some in interpreting the Act: whether they were expected to have an executive or whether they were to limit school council membership to a manageable size.

12) All policies addressed formation of school councils. The majority required the principal to take the initiative; however about one-third required parents to take the initiative.

13) Rules for dissolution of councils were included in all but one of the policies reviewed.

14) A minority of policies defined the minimum member of meetings to be held a year, who was to chair the group and who was to develop agendas. About a quarter also ruled out discussion of individual staff or students at meetings.

Re: Research Question 5: What is the relationship between school boards and school councils?

15) School boards and school councils were most likely to report a good relationship where the parent group was either "Newly Formed" or "Reformed."

16) About half the school board chairs interviewed saw the relationship between their board and the parent group as supportive to education. Suggested changes focused on improved communication, role clarification and more time being spent attending parent council meetings.

IX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOARD ACTION

Conclusion 1: It is not clear in many school council policies the minimum number of members required to form a school council.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that school council policies state the minimum number of members required to form a school council and that the minimum be set reasonably low.

Conclusion 2: School council policies that require parents to take the initiative in forming a school council could deter the formation of councils if parents are not aware of their right to form a council and of the necessary process to follow.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that boards require schools to inform their parents of the steps to take should they wish to form a school council where some form of school council is not currently in place.

Conclusion 3: Although some school council policies included requirements for chairing of meetings, development of agendas or requirements for a quorum, school councils have the power to determine their own conduct for running meetings.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that boards recognize that school councils have the power to determine their own manner of conducting meetings; school council policies should reflect this.

Conclusion 4: By ruling out discussion of individual students or staff at meetings, some policies did not reflect the advisory nature of school councils. They were not intended to be limited in scope in any way by the School Act.

Recommendation 4A: It is recommended that boards review their school council policies to ensure that school councils are encouraged to give advice on any topics within the legislated mandate of a school council. School councils themselves have the discretion to determine any limitations they wish to place on topics for giving advice.

Recommendation 4B: It is recommended that boards advise parent groups of constraints in legislation regarding personnel matters and where to seek advice before dealing with such matters.

Conclusion 5: In cases where principals chair school council meetings, the principal could be in conflict of interest when "the chair" advises "the principal" on matters recommended by the school council.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that a parent serve as chair for school council meetings and that the principal sit as a member of school council in keeping with the advisory nature of the council (to give advice to school administration and the school board).

APPENDIX

Functions Served (See Table 4.2)

Ran/Helped with School Events: This function involves assisting the school with school related events. These events may be sponsored by the school or by the parents. They include: field trips, track and field, graduation, science fairs, Christmas dinners, concerts, dances, carnivals, award nights, theme weeks (e.g. culture, education, environmental) year end picnics, etc.

Help with Renovations: This category involved helping the school improve its facilities. For instance, the rink, playground, landscaping, speakers for the gym, and a larger cafeteria.

Classroom Assistance: Classroom assistance differs from the other forms of assistance in that it is directly related to helping teachers teach. It can involve simple activities like photocopying, or more demanding ones like reading to children and tutoring in specific subjects.

Input in the School: There are a number of topics to which parents give their "two-cents worth," including the budget, extra-curricular events, curriculum, and school policies and procedures. Such policies and procedures can range from the length of the school periods to busing policy, what to do with the students while the school is being renovated to how to rent lockers, from the dates to start and end the Christmas break to how to report child abuse. The list is potentially endless.

There was one area which principals, SB Chairs, and even parents, stressed was not to be discussed in parent group meetings. The topic in question is personnel and student issues. Principals insisted that parent meetings not be used to discuss such issues. (Referred to "normal channels")

Student Oriented Programs: This category involved programs designed for the students' benefit that were sponsored by the parent group. They include hot lunch programs, programs dealing with drugs and alcohol abuse, driver's education, sexual abuse kits, and life skills packages.

Fundraising: Although parents were not asked how the fundraised, they did give some suggestions as to where the money went to. Some used the money to pay for physical things like a computer for the library, or a playground while others used it for less tangible things like field trips, scholarships, and a reading program.

Community Related: In this category, parent groups helped the school get involved with community agencies. One group helped organized a community wide hazardous waste collection day, another provided a float in a parade, and a couple had a mother's day breakfast open to all mothers in the community. Also related to this category are the group's efforts to build the school's profile in community, including improving its image with downtown business people.

Parent Education Workshops: This category involves sponsoring speakers on topics related to parenting. They include traditional topics of physical and sexual abuse, but also methods of building self-esteem in one's child, and disciplining practices.

Communication Between Staff and Parents: Parent groups involved in these roles include sponsoring speakers to explain curriculum, conducting a survey of parents, and being a sounding board to principals.

Communication and Liaison with Non-School Agencies: This refers to the groups willingness to communicate with groups outside of the school's administration. These no-school agencies, although having an important role in education, are organizations and individuals not directly involved in the day-to-day affairs of the school. They include: lobbying the School Board and/or Member of the Legislative Assembly on behalf of the school, reacting to School Board policies, and participation in a overarching parent group organization.

Such an organization, although not widely available, usually involves the chairs of each schools' parent group and someone from the School Board. This allows the parent groups to coordinate activities and communicate to each other about particular issues. Those chairs involved in such an organization mentioned its usefulness in discussing issues related to the elementary schools feeding into the junior and senior high schools.

Future Roles (see Table 4.3)

The roles involved in these categories are similar to the ones mentioned above. The two exceptions are as follows:

School Council Changes: This category referred to issues involving the functioning of the actual parent group. Some of these issues include: getting the parents to chair, increasing the profile of the school council, whether to become a school council, whether to form an umbrella group, and how to get more members involved with the group.

Increased Help: This category refers to all the different forms of help a group could give to a school mentioned above. It includes establishing a volunteer program to manage a phone service, helping to become a community school, sponsoring more parenting programs, organizing community resources (that is, getting people in the community with special skills to help educate students, e.g. firemen, engineers, mechanics), educating parents on education, getting a social counsellor, helping with new Canadians, and helping with renovations.

Comments on School Councils (see Tables 7.2 and 7.3)

Principals and Parents

General Comments - POSITIVE: There are a number of comments that belonged in this category. A sampling of their flavour includes: school councils do not cost school boards anything; increased involvement by parents will increase their commitment; all schools should have one (a parent group); school councils show staff and children their parents care; they strengthen school-community relations; and they help schools run smoothly.

Parents Needed in the Schools: This category is similar to the tone of the general category, but slightly more specific. It includes: the school would have less without councils; the school council can lobby on behalf of the school and give the principal more credibility in his lobbying efforts if the council supports him; the group can absorb some criticism, thereby reducing some of the pressure put on the principals; the school council is useful during crises; and there is greater coordination of class and home oriented school work.

Communication Role is Vital: These comments implied that the existence of a parent group in the school helped for the following reasons: the group provides the principal with a forum to directly access the parents; it also helps reduce misconceptions and controversies; the group provides useful feedback; and the group's willingness to liaise with community groups is important to the school's profile in the community.

General Comments - NEGATIVE: These included: the school board should delegate more to the school councils; school councils could be terrible if done wrong; raised funds should be accountable; if given powers then the council should be responsible, not the principal; there was no need for a parent group to be legislated; the group is meaningless and parents are apathetic; and others felt an umbrella group should be formed for all school councils in an area.

Input: Concerns in this category include: more non-parent input is needed (e.g. business people); the groups should have more input at the school board level; it should have more input on curriculum; and its input should have greater weight -- input is worthless if it has no effect on decisions.

Concerns about Politics: In this category, there were fears that the school council might (1) become a second school board, (2) attract "power- hungry" people, (3) undermine current parent groups, (4) lobby without the principal's knowledge or, alternatively, be used by a principal to lobby for his agenda; and (5) have a hidden agenda. There were also fears expressed by principals that the school board might delegate too much power to school councils without his/her input, and that an umbrella organization of the area's school councils might lobby and act without the principal's or superintendent's knowledge.

General Comments - NEUTRAL: These comments are ones that were deemed as not having any positive or negative judgement to them. They include: wait and see; school councils are too new to compare to old group; no difference; it depends upon who sits on the council; there is a need to educate parents about the realities of the educational system; and councils impose greater responsibility upon parents.

School Board Chairs

A Positive Development: Some of the comments made by school board chairs include: school councils encourage parents to get involved; they increase communication between the school board and parents; they help make the school more effective; they reduce the number of problems in the school. Other comments said school councils should be encouraged but they should be expanded to include community members. Finally, one Chair said she hoped the Home and School Associations in her area would become a school council given its democratic nature.

A Negative Development: The concerns expressed by this category include: school councils could get too much attitude and power, particularly if there are not accountable to anyone; they need a clearer mandate; they increase politics; and principals may have some problems dealing with certain issues (e.g. personnel). In addition, other chairs held that (1) school boards should have more control over school councils since it was ultimately responsible for the group's actions; and (2) elected trustees were more than capable of representing local schools at the school board level.

Dependent on Individuals Involved: The comments here implied that the school councils' success would depend on one or more of the following factors: the principals' ability to deal with crises, school board willingness to use school councils, and on parent interest.

Neutral: There were two types of comments made that fell into this category. First, school councils have a much narrower focus than do school boards. Secondly, one chair felt it was important for the school board to learn how to use school councils since they were essentially parent volunteers.

Jurisdictions Participating in the Study

Telephone Interview

Brooks School Dist. #2092
County of Lac Ste. Anne #28
County of Lacombe #14
County of Paintearth #18
County of Parkland #31
County of Red Deer #23
County of Smoky Lake #13
County of Stettler #6
County of Strathcona #20
County of Vulcan #2
County of Warner #5
Fairview School Div. #50
Foothills School Div. #38
Fort McMurray Catholic #32
Lethbridge School Dist. #51
Rangeland School Div. #9
Red Deer School Dist. #104
Sherwood Park Catholic #105
Willow Creek School Div. #28

Submission of Policy and Referral to Schools Only

County of Grande Prairie #1
County of Mountain View #17
Cypress School Div. #4
Drumheller Valley School Div. #62
East Smoky School Div. #54
Fort Vermilion School Div. #52
Grande Prairie School Div. #2357
Peace River School Div. #10
Provost School Dist. #33
Redcliff School Dist. #2283
Rocky Mountain School Div. #15
Rockyview School Div. #41